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NEXUS

winter/1981

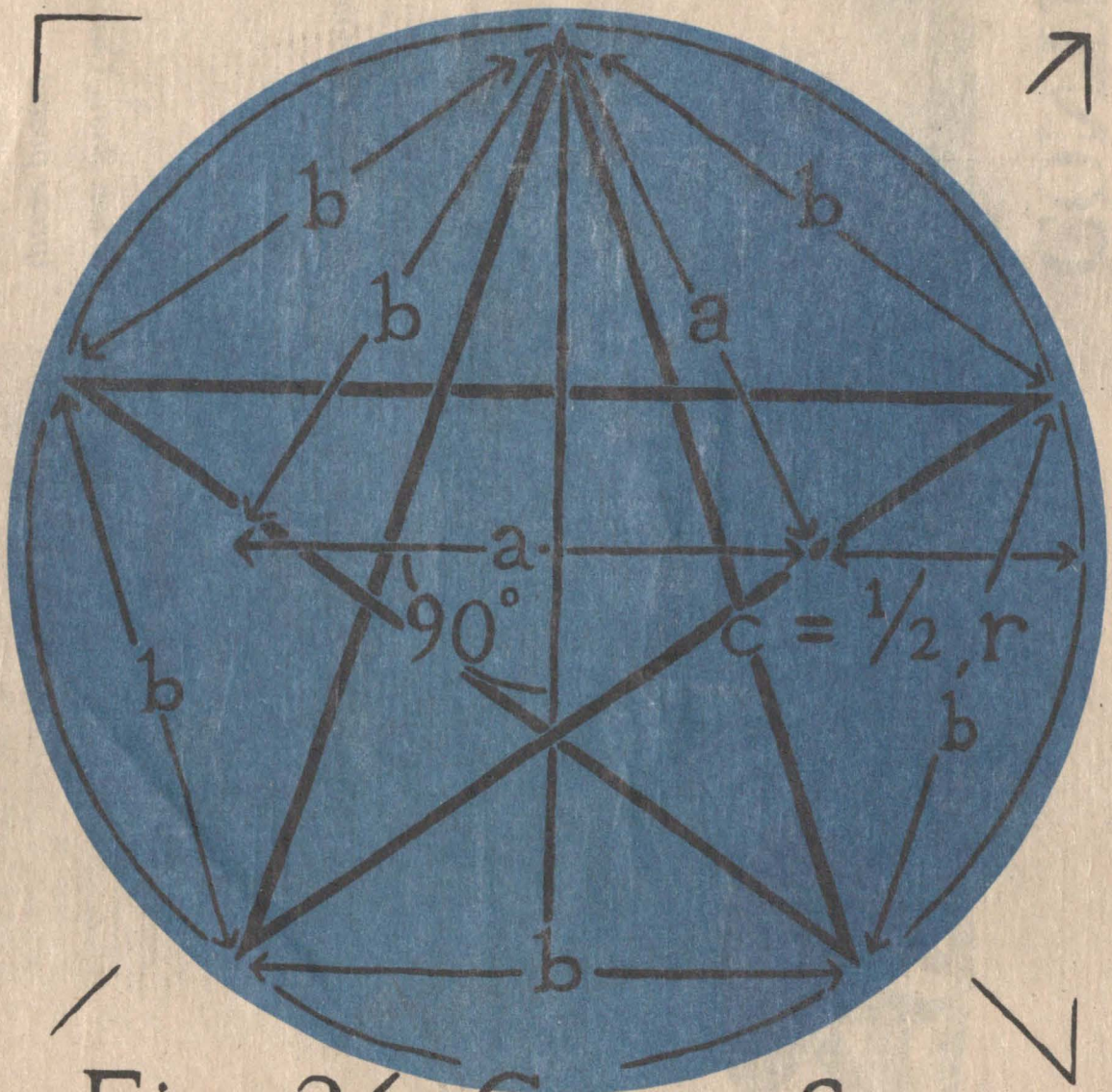


Fig. 26: Con. of pen

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Jeanne M. Julian

Common Ground

My best friend Fay didn't understand. She said, "Jesus, Royann, you almost had yourself an affair. He could have been the love of your life, but now neither one of you will ever know." I tried to tell her, it wasn't Scott himself I minded losing that much--we never did carry on, after all. Something else bothered me. I felt it when me and Randy moved from the Happy Journey Motel to Vernon Wood Apartments, over by Route 3, and we were on the highway between two stubby snowy cornfields. You know how a highway when it's flat and straight looks pinched up ahead? Well, I felt that as we drove, the road would get narrower and narrower until at the end I'd be crammed into a little point.

I know it's because of perspective, like in art, the way a highway looks. Fay Bond--her mother runs the Nu-Du Beauty Shop on Division Street--teaches beauty shop and art at the Mount Vernon Vocational High School. I've been friends with Fay since we all went to the regular high school together, Fay, my husband Randy, and me. She says we've always been friends because out of everybody in high school we had taste. She says my taste is natural and every bit as good as hers, and she studied art and education at Ohio State University for four years. She did seascapes in watercolors, took all shades of blue and sort of striped them on and let them run together and then put a little V-shaped bird in here and there, and there you are. She signed one I got in a frame and it's about fifty times as good as the pictures in the Happy Journey Motel where Randy and me were living on Route 36 until we could find a regular place. Our efficiency had two pictures that looked straight from Woolworth's, printed on cardboard. In the living room was the one Fay called "Wild Horses on Plains" and in the bedroom was one with a barefoot boy in a straw hat, fishing under a covered bridge. I think it was supposed to remind you of Mount Vernon. This one had a title on a dog tag screwed on the frame: "Nostalgic Summer." I used to think "nostalgic" meant something like "nauseous," and this painting did kind of make

you sick, it was so cheap. The motel chairs were too, with plastic cushions, and our rose print bedspread had cigarette burns in the petals, and the TV didn't much work, and somebody had written "I need a fuck" inside the Gideon's Bible. Really we ought to've lived in our truck. It had our stuff from our apartment in Columbus, plus our new living room set which Fay likes and she should because we paid through the nose for it.

The whole motel reminded me of the Ponderosa ranch house on the TV show *Bonanza*, you know? Dark and western, and the swimming pool like a corral in the middle of the parking lot. We first got to the motel at the end of August when it was warm enough to swim. I don't know how to swim exactly, but I'd dogpaddle around. It was nice. Nobody else was ever there, so I could pretend I was in Hawaii, in the ocean. Silly to play pretend at my age, I know. Anyway, Randy was at meetings at school a lot, and setting up his classroom, so I got me a real nice tan. Then one day, I opened the gate, and there was this lifeguard in one of the lounge chairs. I thought I had him pegged right there as some hot-shot athlete. He had skimpy trunks on and a faded T-shirt with some college name on it, and a whistle on a chain, and his arm muscles like huge eggs under the sleeves. I settled myself across the pool from him and soon enough I was sizzling hot. I went over to the ladder and dabbled my toes in the water, but I was embarrassed to dogpaddle in front of Johnny Weismuller there. I let myself down the ladder kind of delicate, the way those types do who don't swim because it rinses off their cocoa butter. I piled my hair on top my head with one hand. My hair's blonde and not long or short--Fay cuts it strange, she tries out the new styles on me--and it flopped down like spaghetti. I tip-toed around with my nose in the air, just dying to splash that gorgeous water all over, feel all cool and wet. Then I thought, what the hell. A lifeguard, he has to be quite familiar with people who can't swim, he has to teach them and save them and everything. So I sashayed over to the side of the pool facing him, and said, "Do you give lessons?"

He was reading a book as big as a Bible. He squinted at me. "Are you talking to me?" he said.

"There's nobody else here," I said.

"What was it you said?"

"I was wondering if you give lessons."

"In what?"

"Swimming. I know it must seem crazy to you, but I'm twenty years old and can't swim a stroke."

"That doesn't seem as crazy as your asking me to teach you."

"Hey, ain't you a lifeguard?"

"No."

I wanted to sink down underwater. "Oh lord, I'm real sorry. I thought with that whistle around your neck you had to be one, and you look like a lifeguard."

"No. An aspiring veterinarian."

"Well, glad to meet you anyway. I'm a perspiring counter girl at Jolly Roger Donuts. Well, not anymore, I quit when we moved from Columbus."

"The Jolly Roger on High Street?"

"That's the one. You live around there?"

"Everybody at Ohio State knows the Jolly Roger."

"My husband went to State, but he's graduated now. You probably didn't know him--Randy Bailes? He was in education. He teaches at the vocational school here. Social studies. Are you just passing through, or what?"

"No, I'll be here for a few months, on an internship with the local vets."

"No kidding? I wanted to be a nurse once, but it didn't work out. Oh, I guess every little girl wants to become a nurse sometime, so if they did, we'd have to shoot some of them to balance things, right? You're staying here at the Happy Journey?"

"Room nineteen."

"Room six. Glad to meet you." I stuck out my hand, but then I realized I was still down in the pool. "Hold on."

I started to plow through the water to the ladder, but all of a sudden I saw this hand reaching down. "Let me help," he said. The second I took his hand he practically yanked me out of the pool, I hardly did anything. Of course I'm skinny as a beanpole so it probably didn't take much effort. On the pavement I wasn't standing more than ten inches from a pair of brown eyes with eyelashes dark and thick as bristles on a new paintbrush. I felt the way you do in a ferris wheel when it starts with a jerk and takes you up so fast you say, "Whoa!" I said, "Well, it ain't a whistle, it's an I.D.!"

"I'm allergic to penicillin. That's what it says."
"A doctor allergic to penicillin." I sat down on the chair beside his, pulled my knees up and put my arms around them. "What's your name?"
"Scott."
"Last name too."
"Scott Oberly."
"That *sounds* like a doctor."
"It should *sound* like a veterinarian."
"Same thing. I'm Royann Bailes. How do you like this place? Stinks, huh."

"It's not bad, temporarily."
"Temporarily—that's the thing. Randy's been looking to find us a decent apartment and there isn't a one. Do you have pictures in your place?"
"Yes, I guess I do."

"Hey, then how about a trade? I mean, as long as I like what you got. It'd be okay, not like stealing, just rearranging."
He thought this was all right so we went over to his place. The efficiencies are dark in the afternoon, especially after coming in out of the sun, because of the overhanging eaves. His was spic-and-span, not a bit like you'd expect from a guy living alone, but more like a monk's den or whatever. The same layout as our apartment, but in reverse. In the living room was a big country scene with barns and stuff in the winter. I can't imagine anyone wanting to hang up a picture of winter in their own home. Real winter lasts long enough without keeping it inside. In the bedroom was one of those pictures with the paint globbed on like plaster, orange and black and white, in lines.

"Now, what's that supposed to be?" I said.
"Maybe the Golden Gate Bridge."
"No trade. Sorry."
Around his mirror he'd taped up the strangest things, hexagons and octagons and I don't know what-agoes, each on a sheet of notebook paper, strung around the mirror like a daisy chain.

"And what is that supposed to be?" I said.
"These? Amino acids. I have to know them for my class."
"What the hell's amino acids?"
"They're essential to human metabolism. They're basic life structures. I need to memorize them, so I taped them by my mirror."

"Well, better than 'Nostalgic Summer,' I must admit. That's the picture in our bedroom. There must be a million of 'em in Woolworth's."

I went on home to eat lunch and it's a good thing I did, too, instead of staying outside, because that night I was red as a beet. Randy was in the bedroom making lesson plans and I was in the living room watching TV and burning up. Every commercial he'd come in and fumigate me with Solarcaine, then he'd go back to work.

The next day my skin was real sore. I didn't open the drapes or get dressed, just slouched around in my ratty old robe, watching the game shows and the soap operas. There was hardly a breeze and no air conditioning either.

But then around two o'clock, there's a knock on the door, and there was the veterinarian. The day before, he'd been cool as a cucumber, but standing at the door there he seemed real jittery. He noticed I was in my robe, and he put his hand over his eyes and said, "Oh. I'll come back later."

I said, "Don't be ridiculous, you already seen me in a bathing suit. Come on in."

He stepped in and said, "Nice place you have here. I feel right at home."

"Except backwards," I said. I was embarrassed. No air or sun, just ribbons of cigarette smoke, and dishes in the sink. I tried to

feel how my hair looked. "Have a seat. Want some V-8 or a red pop?" I sat on the couch, tucked my feet up, and lit a smoke.

He paced around the room, picked up the salt shaker, set it down. He looked at the cover of a *Sports Illustrated* on the coffee table, and said, "I've seen that one."

"Sorry," I said, "Come back next week." I wouldn't have felt such a mess, except he looked so *polished*, and I remembered how neat his apartment had been. "You can sit down, you know."

"No thanks." He danced around a little more, then blurted out, "I'm sorry, I forgot your name, but I've got to talk to somebody."

"It's Royann." I thought, oh here it is, he's going to tell me he's a homosexual or something. There are a lot at Ohio State. "Go ahead."

"I've been studying all morning. I have a final at four-thirty." He stopped. "You wouldn't want to hear about glycogen catabolism, would you?"

"About what?"
"How the body makes glucose. Sugar."
"Sure, that sounds kind of interesting."

He sat at the little kitchen table and hung onto it with one hand, tipping himself back and forth with one strong arm, balanced on the hind legs of his chair. "Well, you see, a stimulus triggers the adrenal medulla to release a hormone, epinephrine--"

"Hold on. I lost you back at stimulation. That's the only part I understood."

"It stimulates the brain," he said, "to release epinephrine."
"That a kind of nasal spray?"

For a second he thought I was serious. He looked at me with his mouth open. Then he laughed, and right there a bunch of nervousness seemed to disappear from the room. He went on and on, and it was a foreign language to me. But it was exciting, too. You know how when somebody yawns you just have to yawn along? Excitement can be like that. It is pretty marvelous when you think about it. See, after the brain is stimulated, in a liver cell all these inactive kinases become active, and the glucose escapes into your blood, and then into your muscles, and on and on. He drew it all out in charts. I think he enjoyed showing it off, like he was showing pictures of his family.

"So," he said, throwing down the pen, "that's it." He looked relieved.

"And you have all that in your head," I said. "So in a way, you know what goes on inside everybody. You know why we eat stuff, and what happens when we breathe, and things most people don't have to vaguest notion about."

He didn't deny it. He said suddenly, "Hey, Royann, what time is it? I've still got to drive to Columbus. I'll be late." He jumped up. "Thanks a lot for letting me bore you."

"Can I keep this?" I held up the chart.
"Sure, if you want it. Thanks. So long."

When he left, I felt full of energy, as if I was going to take the test too. While I washed the dishes I said out loud words like "phosphorylase kinase." It sounded just like something a priest would say, even though I'm not Catholic. I pictured Scott Oberly sitting at his desk at State whipping off pages and pages of these charts, like a swordfighter with a pen, and the teachers picking the pages off the floor and saying, "Amazing! Just marvelous! This boy sure is smart." I neaten up the apartment, took me a bath, and was making a casserole when Randy came in. He's real tall so he walks stoop-shouldered with his head down. He walked in and set down his briefcase and took the V-8 out of the refrigerator before he even said, "What'd you do?"

"What do you mean, honey?"
"You cleaned it up."

"Yes I did and I'm making you special some Green Beans Baked Lucette. How about that? And how about you and me going to a movie tonight?"

He poured his V-8. He appears to concentrate on everything. "What movie?"

"Any old movie."

"Okay with me." He drank up his V-8. "Why are you so fired up to see a movie?"

"I'd just like to get out, I guess."

He sat down on the couch and opened up his briefcase, and

began to read and shuffle things around.

"Randy," I said, "how about me going to college."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean getting a bachelor's."

"We can't afford it."

"Not now, but sometime?"

"We'll see," he said. "What made you want to go to college all of a sudden?"

I almost told him, but then I didn't. I'm not sure why. Maybe I thought Randy'd be insulted that I thought somebody was smarter than he is. He's quite smart, don't get me wrong, but Scott seemed to hold his smartness in a different way or something, the way people get drunk different.

After supper I took the garbage out to the dumpster while Randy was scrubbing his teeth, and I was moseying around the parking lot watching the fog settle in the field behind the Happy Journey, when a car pulled up by number nineteen. Scott got out. I smiled and waved and yelled, "How was your test?"

He made a thumbs down sign in the air.

"How come?" I said. "You knew all the answers."

"The test didn't ask what I studied," he said, and turned his back on me to unlock the door.

I felt a little disappointed, I couldn't see why he wouldn't tell me more, but then I heard Randy behind me say, "Who's that?"

"He's a student who lives here, a student veterinarian from State. I met him by the pool today. He just had a final exam."

"I'm glad I'm done with that mess," Randy said.

I thought a lot about how Scott was doing, but the next time I talked to him, other than hello and goodbye in the parking lot, was after school had started for Randy. One night he was at a P.T.A. meeting, or something, and I was watching TV when I heard a knock on the door and right away I thought it was Scott. I mean, there was nobody else it could've been, you see, because my best friend Fay was at the same meeting as Randy, and she always lets herself in anyway.

Sure enough, there he was. He had on one of those modern suits that are like a shirt instead of a coat, all of this minty green, and a shirt underneath with all kinds of green mixed up like Fay's seascapes. The greens all matched and the browns of his hair and eyes and eyelashes and glasses frames all matched. He had a Ritz cracker with cheese and a hunk of olive in each hand.

"Hi, want a cracker?" he said. He handed me one with a bite out of it, then noticed, and gave me the whole one.

"Sure. What's the occasion?"

"Mind if I come in?"

"No, come on."

He barged right on in, just as lively as before the test, but this time in a happy way. "I went to a party for everyone in my major field."

"Well now, that sounds nice."

"It sucked," he said, real cheerful. "Bunch of scientists. Good thing they study anatomy or they wouldn't know their asses from holes in the ground—oh, does that offend you?"

"Not me."

"Good. I'm sick of watching my language. Horrible party. They were comparing grades and engagement rings all evening. May I have a glass of water?"

"Help yourself." I sat at the kitchen table and watched him hunt in the cupboards.

"I ate and drank a lot. That was all right. But burned my hand trying to extinguish my damn rum bottle."

"Trying to what?"

"Some ass insisted on using proper lab technique before drinking my 151 proof rum. So he sterilized the bottle rim with his lighter, and of course it flamed like a goddam blowtorch. Am I interrupting your TV? You were watching TV."

"Just some old show. Were there girls at this party?"

"Oh yeah. I didn't dance until I was pretty loaded and then everybody stopped to watch me. I was standing on a piano bench." He sort of swayed, and almost fell into the couch. "I don't mind watching TV if that's what you were doing. I'll sit here and rest until the show's over."

We laughed at the same lines in the show, and then he stopped laughing, and before you know it he was snoring, slouched right there on my couch, chin on his chest and his feet

on the floor in these nice stiff-looking shoes. I peeked at him once in awhile.

He woke up at a commercial. I said, "Want to put your feet up? Go ahead, put your feet up."

He heaved one leg onto the couch, the foot drooped over the edge so the shoe wouldn't smudge nothing. Then his eyes shut as if those thick lashes just weighed them down. I had a crazy urge to sit beside him and put my arm around him. Or even lie down beside him, line him up against me like a ruler. I never felt like that toward any man since I married Randy, and to tell the truth I never felt exactly like that around Randy. So even though this was purely innocent and Randy himself wouldn't have thought twice about it if he'd come home then and there, I felt a little nervous. As a matter of fact, I didn't want Randy to barge in and break the spell, so to speak. So I coughed and wiggled in my chair until Scott woke up.

"Hi," I said, and then realized that was exactly what I say to Randy when he wakes up mornings, same soft voice. So I got real nervous then. "You old drunk. How do you expect me to take my shower with you laid out here in the living room?"

"What?"

"Sorry. Have to throw you out. Me and Randy are going to a party, and he expects me to be ready when he gets home."

Scott looked like somebody threw water in his face. He was all apologies going out the door.

"Do you need help walking back?" I asked.

"Nah."

But I watched him go down the walk until he got to his door. Randy didn't come home until late after all. He'd gone with some other teachers to the Carriage Room for a couple beers. I got mad waiting for him to come home. I'd gotten rid of my company for his sake and here he didn't even arrive until after midnight. So we had a small argument about that. Usually I never mind if he goes out with other people, and of course we weren't going to any party that night, but I nagged him about leaving me alone.

Then the worst part. When we got into bed Randy tried to make up. Frankly I didn't want him in bed with me at all that night, and I tried to pretend it was because I was mad at him for being late, but I guess I was comparing him with Scott. When Randy and me made love it was like two sticks rubbing together to make a spark, but I was the deadwood. I was all dry and when he pushed against me it was as if he was saying "love me, love me." Usually I'm very sexy. But the whole time, to shut it out, I was thinking about Scott sitting there at our table, licking his lips, picking up the pencil, smiling and saying, "It stimulates the brain to release the hormone, epinephrine."

I didn't see Scott for two whole days after that. But then he telephoned. It was at eleven o'clock in the morning. I answered the phone and a voice said timid, "Royann?"

"That's me. Who's this?"

"Scott Oberly."

"For heaven's sakes, where are you?" I had the notion he was in another state or another country and was calling to ask me to go to him. Phones make people's voices sound funny, far away, but personal still, because it's aimed at you.

"I'm here," he said. "At Henneman's clinic. I just had to tell somebody, this is so great!"

"Well, what is it? You sound like you just had a baby."

"No, a castration!"

"Oh!"

"Not me, a dog. I finally did an operation by myself. I fixed a dachshund named Noodles in thirty-eight minutes. Not bad time, eh?"

"Not as they go, I guess."

"Henneman does it in twenty-five to forty-five minutes. Royann, I learned more by doing it myself than by watching Doc do it fifty times."

"Well, that's just great."

Then there was silence. At last I said, "You were all right, weren't you, after you left my place?"

"Oh, sure. Hope your party was better than mine."

"Oh--oh, not much. People kept talking tractors, and I wanted them to talk about grades and engagement rings."

"Well, thanks, Royann. Thank you for listening to me. I'm glad I happened upon your sympathetic ear, here where I don't

know anybody."

I held the phone tight. "Tell Noodles I hope he feels better."

"Unfortunately, he'll feel much less from now on."

"All the bitches in Mount Vernon will wish you'd never come here."

"That's why I'm going back to school in January. The dogs would run me out of town. I'd better go now. So long."

"Good bye. Congratulations."

I'd forgotten he would only be in Mt. Vernon for awhile. But while he was here we visited each other quite a bit during the day. I fell in love with him. I told Fay. She said I should tell him and see what happened. I didn't much like that idea because he didn't seem in love with me, and I didn't *dis*-love Randy. But Fay said Jesus, Scott was over all the time, he was always thanking me for being around him, how could I go wrong?

At Thanksgiving, Scott went home to Chicago, the Windy City--I always liked that name. His father is a doctor for humans, and as Scott said, he "loves money not medicine." Me and Randy went to his folks' as usual and his mama gave me a turkey head she made out of felt that you put on a pineapple butt, with the pineapple lying down, and the leaves of the pineapple look like the turkey tail. It's pretty silly but I guess I'll have to use it with his folks being around.

The Monday Scott came back to Mt. Vernon it was snowing and he came to our place right away. He looked beautiful in the doorway, the snow on the shoulders of his hide coat he had that looked like something the ranchers would wear on *Bonanza*.

"Are you going to stand there and let me freeze?" he said. He had stocking feet. He always ran over from his place in his stocking feet, even in the cold.

"Come on in. How do you like the snow?"

"Pain in the ass."

"I think it's pretty. Coffee?"

"Why not." He roamed around the room and slapped things with his gloves. "How was your Thanksgiving?"

"Okay. We went to Randy's folks'. How about yours?"

"Lousy."

I thought he was worked up for the same reason I was. We sat down on either end of the couch, sort of sideways, facing each other, so we could look out the window behind us. He kept his coat on and held his coffee cup with both hands, hardly drinking any. He said he thought the clouds were accumulated stratus, or something, and he told me all the names of clouds and how they are different, and about snow being crystals, and all the snow crystals are different. It was so marvelous I busted out, "You know so much! It makes everything about twice as beautiful when you know about it. I wish I could know about things like that."

"You don't have to, Royann, you appreciate them anyway."

That's why we get along. We're from different backgrounds but--" he pointed up and closed his eyes like a preacher--"we have found common ground among the clouds."

I began to think Fay was right. Common ground among the clouds. There we were, sitting on the same couch in that gray light from the snow. He'd understand me and he'd know what to do. I got ready to say it: Scott, I don't think I love Randy anymore.

"Royann, I've got to talk to you. This was the worst weekend in my life."

"Why's that, Scott?"

Then he told me how he'd had a fight with his father during vacation. His father didn't want him to be an animal doctor and wouldn't give him any more money. "So," said Scott, "I have to quit and go back to Chicago for awhile."

He kept slapping things with his gloves and didn't drink his coffee until it was cold and then chugged it down. We talked, and I said someday he'd be a vet, even if it took a little longer, even if he didn't come back to State. So he started feeling better and when he left he gave me a hug and said, "Royann, you saved my life."

Randy came home around four o'clock as usual. He walked in and set down his briefcase and took the V-8 out of the refrigerator. We had fish for dinner and it stunk up the whole place. After dinner I took the garbage out while Randy scrubbed his teeth.

The snow covered the parking lot, smooth as a brand clean sheet. I dumped the garbage into the dumpster, which also stunk, and then turned around and saw that perfect snow with only my footprints in it. And I don't know what made me do this, but you know how you make angels in the snow when you're a kid? I lay down carefully, and flapped my arms and legs the way you do to make an angel's wings and skirt, staring up at the sky with no stars. I didn't have a coat on and I got cold and wet, and dirty because the snow wasn't very deep.

Randy looked up from his papers when I came in, and said, "What'd you do?"

"I was just playing," I said, and shook my head to get the wet crystals out of my hair.

The next day, or the day after, or sometime around then, we found a place at Vernon Wood Apartments. Fay lives there and she heard about these people moving out, and she told us right away. So we left the Happy Journey even before Scott Oberly went away. I never saw him again. I don't know if I loved his smartness or just thought his muscles were sexy, or what. I wish I knew what made us love people. It must be some chemical from a stimulated brain, basically. Some marvelous chemical that streams right through your blood clear to your fingertips.

Paul Rehg

Living Together

Ed and Rose got married next door. It said so on their black Monte Carlo in white letters: Ed and Rose. The white finger paint was so thin the black car showed through. But it was readable. Until Ed washed the car. Two days later with a hose in his left hand and a sponge in the other. It came right off.

winter/1981

Janet Joel Boring

The African Room

zinc-faced killer after Mom zombie and brunettes
strange plunge: steaming wax jetties deep no hands, paws
this is the African Room, buffalo region: French safaris, khaki
within the roped-off area this is the cereal hour Tony, fuck your mother or is it
the other way around - pornography! straight
from spilling out foaming porno what a beat crapper zinc-faced, skin-
peeler, uses a - no more skin, slow death welcome to the hothouse
dying tomato plants hear the wails gag on rose
pure red rose death. This is the slime desire moment what a - skunk yourself
zero that woman is tense about to blow: plasma everywhere,
menstruation gel - what a m- porno, stop me that woman's psychéd
she's tearing up
her Sunday Times any minute now she'll - ten, nine, eight, pure Nasa hi-pe,
there goes the Book Review section - confetti: Greetings! cafe-bored-make-believe-
industrious-creative folks! Is everyday like Sunday Brunch? Let's hear it
for Welfare! Food Stamps! Hanging Out! (give me an H) Is this art? Never!
Good. What a relief, lose once and they'll get you
ship you off to the museum, prickled-skin and zinc-faced Smokey the Bear,
Popeye, Olive Oil - what a night porno, somebody stop me

Rick Strader

Belleek

white fingers and hands
flutter and knead
across warm backs
of young black boys

belt-buckle scars and
nine winters
dryness
quietly absorbed
under the off-white cream

realizing how little
has flowed
inside
my thumbs press harder
sometimes
sometimes
it is all that I can give

chipped around the rims
but not flawed
catholicism swirls
and sloshes
inside
the cup and saucer
of your belleek complexion
-the cream color-
delicate etchings of green
balancing
wedding night blood
the brides of erin
bitterly swallowing
the potato-whiskey of neglected lust
this antique china of advice
handed down
like a set of dishes
thrown glazed and fired
from fingertips hands and arms
that have never lain down
with a kindly man
or a god

J. O. HENRY

THE CYANIDE GANG

thousandths of an inch deep so that if you cut the part in two and were able to look at the cross section you would see the two concentric rings separated by the depth of case. Upon quenching, this case becomes very hard and wear resistant, on mower blades, for example, the blade retains its cutting edge and also resists wear caused by the scything action of the mower due to the case hardening. While there are other methods of case hardening, and we use most of them here at this plant, cyaniding is the fastest and cheapest method we have and it is particularly suitable for small parts. Now, have you understood what I have been saying?"

"Yes sir, I believe I have."

"Good, and, after you have been here for a while, if you are interested in learning more about the process stop by my office and I'll loan you a book about it."

Pete then called in the four men who along with myself comprised the cyanide gang, and while they were looking me over made the introductions which they acknowledged either with a grunt or not at all. The group leader was a German named Werner, a huge man over six feet tall with a tremendous belly, a walrus mustache sprouted from his florid face. There were two Italians, Joe from the North of Italy was blonde, blue eyed, and square built; Tony from Sicily was short, pudgy, black eyed with a light olive complexion, and black hair. Last was a Greek named Angelo who was thin and wiry, dark complexioned with a slim mustache, and gray eyes.

"Dutchman," Pete said to Werner, "you got him for what he's worth, just don't kill him or let him kill himself."

He then took me over to the door of the Locker room, "Do you go by John or what?"

"Tieg," I answered.

"Okay, Tieg, you listen to the Dutchman, watch him and the others and try to learn, and for God's sake be careful. I'd much rather fire you than have to answer questions about how you got killed." He looked me in the eyes for what seemed a long time and then for the first time that day I saw just the hint of a friendly smile, "Good luck," he said as he turned and left.

Werner grunted, "Put on cap and shield," and grabbing me by the arm he led me over to his pot line saying, "Stay by me and don't get in way!" The room was about one hundred feet long by forty feet wide with the cyanide pots on one side and the quench tanks on the opposite side. Inside the square under-fired furnaces were the cyanide pots, two and one-half feet in diameter and three and one-half feet deep with rounded bottoms and with individual fume hoods overhead. Sodium Cyanide pellets or eggs were melted in the pots and held at a tempera-

ture of 1500 degrees Fahrenheit, and every once in awhile the rolling boiling action of the salt would cause a break in the thin carbonaceous covering and what the men called "Devil's eyes" would momentarily appear as if winking at you. This room could well have been a stage setting for a scene from Dante's Inferno what with the steam and oil smoke from the quench tanks, the "Devil's eyes", fumes from the pots, flame from the open burners, and the ungodly heat. Werner took a ten foot pole with a hook on one end and impaled a small part through a hole and dropped it into the water quench while positioning me about fifteen feet away. He then approached the pot from the side so that the fume hood was protecting him as he dropped the wet part into the cyanide. There was a report like a rifle shot, molten cyanide sprayed out of the pot and as I jumped I saw the rest of the gang laughing, all except Werner, he looked grim as he said, "This is first of don'ts. Don'ts more important than do's. Don'ts kill!"

For the rest of that day and the following day I observed the various practices used in the working of the cyanide process. In those first days, I couldn't believe men worked in industry under conditions like these, and if I hadn't seen this with my own eyes I still wouldn't have believed it. Suited up, as we were, not a breath of air could reach your body, just standing around the sweat poured off me, and every ten minutes or so you had to go to the locker room and clean off your face shield and goggles and ring the water out of the sweat band worn around your forehead. I was bewildered and apprehensive, and the cold, unfriendly attitude of the men did nothing to lessen my foreboding.

On the third day, I was given an empty pot line, and for the rest of the week I rehearsed the techniques which I had to learn if I was going to continue working there. Along the side of my pot were two containers called kegs, one contained inward pointing burners and the other was filled with oil, their only purpose was to make sure that no moisture was left on the parts prior to their immersion in the cyanide. The baskets were made of heavy gauge stainless steel wire attached to a five foot rod with an eye bolt welded on about two feet up the rod from the basket, on the other end of the rod was a "T" handle. The operation had seemed easy enough when I was watching the others, you loaded one basket with parts and using the hoist lifted it up and swung it over the burner keg lowering it into the keg where the flames were supposed to burn off any moisture, then load another basket, transfer the first from the burner keg to the oil keg, and put the second basket into the burner keg, load the third basket, transfer the first to the cyanide pot, the second basket to the oil keg and then load the third into the burner keg, load the fourth basket, wait the length of time specified on the work order to obtain the desired depth of case, then take the first basket out of the cyanide and quench the parts in either oil or water as specified, by dumping the parts into the quench tanks, and then repeat the process all over again. The hot cyanide, dripping off the baskets when the basket was swung from the pot over to the quench, hit the concrete floor sounding like firecrackers going off, and when the work order specified water quench all the parts hit the water at the same time and sounded like a cannon being fired. Every day in the cyanide room was like the Fourth of July.

The first time I filled the baskets with parts and yanked the chain, the basket flew up to the ceiling spilling the load all over. Angelo, whose line was next to mine, came running over, his lips moving and his face flushed and contorted with anger. Reaching me, he took off his mask and stuck his face up to mine yelling, "Twitch the falls! Not yank you goddamned dumb son-of-a-bitch! What in hell were you thinking of when you were supposed to be watching us? Of all the men we could have gotten, we end up with a goddamned stupid kid. Now," taking an empty basket and attaching the hook to the eye he placed my hand on the chain falls and his hand on top of mine, "I'll show you how to twitch." He gently moved my hand downward about six inches and the basket rose about two feet, the proper working height for swinging. While doing this with my left hand he placed my right hand on the T-handle showing me how to prevent the basket from tilting and also, at the same time, exerting downward force to keep the basket parallel with the floor. We did this several times before he left me alone telling me to practice with an empty basket, and after I got the

hang of it to practice with half and then full loads.

When he started to leave I said, "Thanks a lot, Angelo."

He turned around and growled, "Don't thank me, you dumb bastard, I had to show you in order to keep you from killing me."

"A real friendly bunch," I thought as I started to practice, spending a whole day trying to get the hang of those damn falls, always my twitching would get the basket too high or too low, but by noon of the fourth day I had it down fairly good even with a full load. Then came the swinging, it had looked so easy when they did it, but I damn near threw myself out of joint my first time, ending up facing the quench tanks instead of the kegs, a perfect 360 degree turn; however, remembering the lesson of the chains, I had started with an empty basket, if I hadn't I would have sprayed parts all over the room. I didn't look around, but I knew they were laughing. Finally, though, even this came around, and while I was nowhere as good as they were I thought I would be able to work with the real thing Monday without injuring myself or them.

I was puzzled and hurt though, only Werner and Angelo had spoken to me all that week, and then only to instruct. After that blow-up Angelo had with me on Wednesday morning, not another word had been said. I knew that the man, who was killed and I was replacing, had worked with them for years; but, I hadn't killed him and I felt that they were taking it out on me. The close friendship of these men for each other was peculiar in that, in Chicago, the ethnics usually kept to themselves and deep friendships were formed only within their own kind - all I could figure out was that the hazardous nature of the work was the catalyst which cut through the ethnic boundaries. On my first day I had seen that they had great hunks of meat and cheese in their sandwiches, so I flushed my peanut butter ones down the john, and ate my apple out in the die yard while they ate in the locker room. I didn't want them to know that I couldn't afford anything else, and I did not want to give them more chances to slight me.

That weekend gave me a chance, not only to rest my aching muscles, but to think about the happenings of the past week; and, as I did so, my hurt changed to anger. This anger gradually replaced the apprehensions I had about working a live pot line; resolving that I would ignore them as they had me, I slept easy that weekend and even looked forward to the next week. Surprisingly enough, I was able to do a half-way decent job; while not nearly as fast as they were, I did manage to do the work with no more than a couple minor burns and a few spilled parts. True to my resolve, I had ignored them completely and did so for the rest of the week knowing that it was childish, yet, I got a sense of satisfaction out of doing it.

Friday was payday, my first since you got paid this week for the previous week's work. About nine, Pete came around with the Brinks men as you were paid in cash and he had to identify you to them. As he did so he looked at me, "I see you're still alive. How is it going? Have you learned anything?"

"Yes sir, and about a lot of things besides cyaniding," I answered.

He looked me in the eye and again there was a hint of a smile, "Fine, I think you'll do."

"Hot damn," I thought, "at least this guy thinks I'm doing okay." I felt good all over, and after he left I opened the envelope, there it was, fourteen whole dollars, I counted it again and again, the money plus his words made up for the past two weeks.

At lunch, I sat in the die yard savoring the pleased look that would be on Mom's face when I handed her the pay envelope. My daydreams were interrupted by the slamming of the locker room door, I looked up and the rest of the gang were coming towards me, "Oh shit, what's going to happen now?"

Werner came up and said, "You don't eat good," and with that he slapped a big sandwich in my hand and grinned, "You a good kid. When I tell Mama you only eat apples she make you this." They all had something for me, I felt like bawling as the tears came to my eyes.

After lunch as we went back to the cyanide room, Werner put his big arm around my shoulder, "After work we go to Jake's bar for beer, Ja?"

"But I'm only eighteen," I said.

"Jake no mind, you work like man, you drink like man, ja?"

Mike Samuelson

David

if you only knew
what your marble muscles
have done to flesh failures:

Disco Davids, Aramis and Amyl Nitrates
perspire/aspire and gyrate desperately
under strobe lights, begging
to meat you

Health Spa Davids, menthol sweat fiends
in front/inside of mirrors, hoping
to be you

David Groupies, travel in sixes with
hairbrushes and transistors, cry in
bed until 3am, masturbate
to images of unwashed varsity jackets

Power Davids, martini brains stuff
their bellies, flex their armies,
slay their dragons

David Commercials, having slain Goliath
they sell razor blades and shaving cream

Drug Davids, like you, always stoned

if you knew, David, how these
blood beasts beg to be immortal marble,
you would grow round, soft and weak
and set us free

M. Clifford-Proud

much more you know i haven't begun to really discuss the addiction
how this husk came to be removed from the stalk and tossed to the
earth or the mystical observations made of the black eyed runner
whose mesmerizing techniques have become so acute so perfected so
don't get me wrong i see you like momaday's black haired indian
running along the ridge in the moist blue dawn that exquisite freedom
mocking life's shackles you seem so unaware of how beautiful you are
and god knows you'll flush to read this line but everyone who's
beautiful should know it even me i was beautiful but no one told me
and when i found out the truth i became bitter about the deception
the ironies of life but you are blossoming and god i'd love to share
that with you i cry because i know the walls that inevitably separate
me from the realization of that oh well but god and lawrence's
description of the love between his fictionally created man and
woman as dark palpable joy will always stand clear of my cluttered
thoughts as that which might have described us

When Snow Comes

so do you
escaped from your cell
to home traditions
wrinkled memories,
fading friends
Ice can melt, even in winter
swell into rivers
that rush through our eyes
wash away dust
time created
Trading gifts,
every idea in foil and bows
Hidden surprises
begging for the naked lens
When snow comes, so do you
like a friendly blizzard
laughlines growing
with newborn memories
kaleidoscope friends.

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DORIS ROWLAND

The Shopping Trip

It was a crazy idea, but she braided her long strands anyway,
fixing the round orange, red, black and white beaded disks next
to each ear, then braiding the leather strips into her long
greying hair. The long beaded piece at the end of each leather
strip was displayed with care. Around her neck she fixed a small
brown-beaded necklace with three sea-urchin spines. When she
was done she stepped back to admire herself in the mirror. She
was excited by what she saw. She saw a slender woman in a soft
beige gauze dress looking at her with large blue eyes.

The Indian jewelry and braided hair brought out her ancestral
Cherokee cheek bones and made her proud of her heritage.
Then in the dimly-lit room she was for a moment mesmerized by
a countenance that seemed to look at her from another time.
During that moment she saw a face that was hauntingly
beautiful. Then she felt sad and that old sense of loneliness
nagged again.

She laid down on the bed and wondered about getting old. All
the memories seemed to swirl in bittersweet profusion. She
remembered the three beautiful young men who had loved her
long ago. Did she still love them? Did they ever think of her?
Would they love her now that she was almost old? Her husband,
Sam, loved her, she knew that, but he was older and he seemed
to be aging too quickly. She didn't like it, she just didn't like it.
It frightened her. In recent years she knew their conversations
were lacking and she often felt bored and impatient with them.
And somewhere inside of her she feared being alone.

She used to feel self-sufficient and didn't mind the idea of
being alone, but now she dreaded loneliness and even with the
family around she could feel isolated.

She sat down again before the mirror and began to loosen her
hair. She thought about wanting to be beautiful, and not
growing old. Her eyes looked beyond her face at the open closet
door. The simple gauze dress and the beige canvas shoes
straight from the catalog, had just arrived, the first dress she
had bought in years.

As she combed out her hair she decided to go shopping
tomorrow. She would go to a mall sixty miles away and would
wear her Indian jewelry and new beige dress.

The shoe salesman was a young man who talked about his
church and she listened and smiled, enjoying his intense
conversation and bought a pair of black pumps. Then she went
to the lingerie department and tried on several bras and, of all
things, a black flimsy little thing that the clerk called a teddy.
She bought three bras but turned down the sexy black teddy as
impractical and expensive.

When she left the department store she walked up the mall
and was amused at the unrestrained and delighted curiosity of
two young children toward her. They pulled and yanked at their
mother's arms to get nearer to her. She smiled at the children
and wished she could have lifted them up and hugged them. The
mother ignored her and pulled her children along. The
dehumanizing process starts at a young age, she thought. The
older women and their husbands just looked at her blankly with
their flat expressionless faces. Some man in a jewelry store
waved frantically as she passed. He made her a little nervous,
but when later she found a dress that she liked, not expensive
but soft and feminine and the teenaged clerks responsive and
friendly, complimenting her openly on the beadwork, she
bought the dress and a soft-woven cotton purse.

When she left the store she realized she was starved. She
looked down the mall and saw the Steak House. Sam had never
taken her there because any restaurant with the name "steak"
in it had to be expensive. So she went in and discovered to her
disappointment that it was one of a chain of steak houses. The
hell with it; she bought herself a lunch. A white-haired
gentleman who had a striking resemblance to Sam's deceased
father, sat down near her. He seemed oblivious of his
surroundings, clearly accustomed to eating alone and bent over
his meal, enjoying it. His gentle looks and mannerisms were so
like Dad's that he was almost like the ghost of the man she had
loved, a genuinely good man. Sam was very much like him:
gentle, patient and naive. As she watched him she felt strangely
ashamed; she didn't quite know why, yet she did.

She left the restaurant and tried to find a couple blouses and a
winter skirt but nothing caught her eye so she decided to go
home, but before she left, she went back to the first store and
bought the black teddy. On the way to the car she felt she had
done a foolish thing. She had always been careful with money.

Heading home she felt a little sad. Then on the highway a big
truck pulled along on her right side and suddenly a beautiful
young man was leaning half out the window smiling broadly at
her. She smiled in spite of herself. He was handsome and at
least ten years younger, with broad shoulders and a muscular
arm. They smiled at one another continuously for a long stretch,
his was a wonderful fresh flirty Italian kind of smile, almost a
laughing smile. It made her feel so good inside. It made her day!
No, it made her week! In fact it was the nicest thing that
happened to her all summer and she was full of warm feelings.
There was nothing vulgar in it yet it was definitely flirty. "How
much fun it must be to make love with someone like that," she
thought. "I wonder if that's how the Italians are?"

She looked down at her dress to see if the truck driver was
looking at her knees, and then she decided he couldn't see them.
Then she did something that made her feel really wild. She let
the hem of her dress slip up a few inches above her silk
stockinged knees. Then she looked at her knees and back at the
truck driver. She knew he couldn't see her knees, but she could
see his flirty smile. He winked at her and her knees felt weak.
She thought of the sexy teddy and she smiled to herself.

When he took an off ramp and watched her in his rear view
mirror until he could no longer see her, she winked back.

DIANE L. WILSON

LANVILLE

"Oh Linda!" Mrs. Yoder called after me in her musical, high pitched, and slightly nasal voice, "Do you think you could possibly have those two chiffon dresses back to me by tomorrow afternoon?"

Trying hard to smile as I turned, half way down her front porch steps, I hedged, "I'm not too sure, Mrs. Yoder; after all, those alterations would normally take the better part of three days to finish." Yet as soon as I saw the elderly woman's white head begin to nod slowly and retreat, I weakened. "But I'm sure if I start on them as soon as I get home, I can have them back by...say...two o'clock tomorrow, o.k.?"

"Linda, you're an absolute angel! You're sure it won't be an inconvenience?" she finished, knowing perfectly well that I wouldn't go back on my promise.

"Quite sure, Mrs. Yoder. See you tomorrow at two." I pulled my heavy grey wool coat closer around me and started home. November this year was so cold!

"Hi Linda!" chanted half a dozen small children who were making leaf houses in the connecting Martin-Anderson yards.

"Hello," I yelled over my shoulder as I turned the corner. Even from Columbia Street I could hear them playing and arguing because someone stepped over a wall instead of going through the imaginary door.

Small towns are amazing. Everyone knows everyone, and all about them. I mean, in just the ten short minutes I spent with Mrs. Yoder, I found out that Karen Simpkins--rather Koehler, (she was married last weekend), is (with a wink) pregnant; Andy Koffman's son, Andy Jr., is going to agricultural school at the capital. Everyone supposes Andy Jr. will take over his daddy's farm in a few years. Poor Mrs. Tanner is still in the nursing home on the hill just outside of town, and Lord have mercy, her divorced daughter, Anna, hasn't been to see her in three weeks! Can you imagine?! And there were stories of at least ten others from Lanville to Rock Creek. Seems like once the gossip starts, everyone knows it, and everyone has their own preferred version of the story...good or bad. And if a person has been tarnished in an earlier incident, look out! The poor soul's painted black for the rest of their days, at least while they live in or near the town.

The warm smell of a log fire drifted around me as I approached two-nineteen Waverly Avenue. The Hendricks, our next door neighbors, seem to have their fireplace busy from late October to mid March.

Mother and I had spent our past three years here at two-nineteen Waverly; in this lovely white colonial home. The house itself had been built around 1912 and the nostalgic cupola was still perfectly intact and sat like a hat atop the roof. In the summer I love to sit in the small room all by myself and read; generally my readings include an odd mixture of Emily Dickenson and Edgar Allen Poe.

We moved here from the farm immediately after Father died.

No one would tell me exactly what happened to him on that rainy July day; I'd been on vacation at Lake Kenosha with the Church Bible Study group at the time. Needless to say, I was in shock for quite a while after I came back. But, I did find out, accidentally, what happened to my father, though I never told anyone. I'm sure they all thought it best to save me from the horrible details. I ran across an edition of the *Lanville Post* that was printed the day after Father died. The first page headline article read as follows:

Marlow County Farmer Dies In Freak Accident

Walter Randolph Caine died Saturday in a gruesome farming accident which partially dismembered his body. A faulty timing mechanism on his new Palmer-Cortez combine was to blame. Walter was testing his new piece of machinery when the accident occurred. Spokesmen for the Palmer-Cortez Company are still investigating the incident and have not yet released a formal statement. Walter was survived by his wife, Adrian Combs-Caine, and his daughter, Linda Marie Caine.

I still have nightmares about that accident, even though I wasn't there at the time.

Father and I were so close; ever since I can remember, our relationship had been something really special. As the only child, I was at times inseparable from my parents, especially Father. After I was born, mother never again conceived. Not that my folks didn't want more children, but after mother turned thirty-five, they gave up hoping for a larger family and lavished all their maternal and paternal affections on me. All year 'round I helped Father on the farm with anything he would let me do. He was always teaching me new things, showing me things in a way I had never looked at before, and he always had time to sit down and talk to me or explain the most trivial things to me. My father was the strongest, kindest, gentlest man I ever knew. It's no wonder I still have difficulty accepting his death.

Climbing the front steps of the house, I noticed that something was wrong. The house didn't look normal. The windows! Mother had drawn all the curtains; the brown frilly pricillas in the family room and the dark blue satins on the other windows in the living room were drawn. It was only three-thirty in the afternoon, and a perfectly beautiful day at that! Mother loves the sunlight in her house and never draws the curtains during the day. Why would she draw the curtains today, for heaven's sake?

I checked the small black box in the center of the huge front door for mail and went inside. The telephone on the conversation table in the foyer was off the hook. A shrill electronic tone droned from the receiver, annoyingly. "Mother?!!"... "Mother?!!"...a little louder... "Mother?!!"... Although she didn't speak, she wasn't difficult to find. She was sitting quietly in the bent oak rocker near the dark stone fireplace. The rocker, as well as everything else in the family room, was in it's normal place, yet something was wrong. "Mother?" my tone was gentle. "What's wrong?"

"Randy." she whispered.

"Randy what?" I was mentally conjuring up an image of my younger cousin Randy; tall, lean, fair...

"Randy...shot...killed...your Uncle Kent. He...he..." Her speech failed her and she began to rock, nervously and rather fast.

"Mother, what do you mean Randy shot Uncle Kent?" I stammered. "I just saw both of them this morning."

"Just that...Randy shot his father. An hour ago. Someone just came...they told me...Kent's dead. Oh, Linda!"

I was on my knees beside the rocker during the whole of the strange conversation, when suddenly Mother fell into my arms, sobbing. We sat like that for an hour or so, I don't remember exactly how long; Mother in my arms, the rocker rocking alone, the dark room growing darker.

I was stunned, immobilized. Uncle Kent had been an alcoholic for years. He had failed to provide for his three motherless children, of whom Randy was the eldest. Randy was both mother and father to his two younger brothers and supported them in every way imaginable. Uncle Kent was away from home most of the time, sometimes for days at a stretch. Though he was not, by far, a decent man in Lanville's terms, the Caine family had never shunned him. They often tried to help him and the kids, but he usually rejected all attempts of kindness.

So Randy grew up quickly. I knew he did some things that

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weren't on the right side of the law every now and then, but he could always convince me that it was all right, that it was the only way to get his brothers the things they needed. No one had ever really been hurt by anything he had done; at least that's what I had always tried to believe, until a couple of years ago anyway. A friend of Randy's let it slip out in a conversation with me, that Randy had been fencing pot for a lot of the high school kids. I found out that Randy was doing a variety of drugs himself. I've been scared for him ever since; I also knew he and Uncle Kent far from got along.

When Mother composed herself much later, she told me what happened. "Officer Stanaford came by and told me the story." she began, "He said Randy had been 'doing acid' and that he was 'pretty gone' when Uncle Kent came home and started pushing him around. I guess Kent went too far and Randy pulled out a gun from the hall closet and shot him. Just like that." Then, staring into the empty fireplace, "Mr. Stanaford said they found Randy cradling Kent in his arms, on the living room rug; he was in such a state and crying so hard, they had to call Doctor Taylor from Rock Creek. Linda, what does it mean? What's 'doing acid'?"

I began to cry.

The sun came up the next morning, round and yellow, just as if it had been written into the script. Thin rays of light slid between the window shutters of my bedroom. The light fell over my covers like bars on a prison cell. I slid out of bed and pulled on a pair of faded Levi's and a warm cable-knit sweater, both of which I picked up off the bare wooden floor. After lacing up a pair of pseudo-hiking boots, I checked in on Mother, who was sleeping restlessly on half of her double bed. Downstairs, I pulled out a red windbreaker from the hall closet and went for a walk.

I walked nearly three quarters of the morning. It was the small farm, just five miles outside of town that I needed to visit. Back to the carefree days of my childhood when daisies grew wild in the meadow, yellow and white and clean. It was a time when I

thought Lanville was a pure and simple little town, and that crime and mean people only existed in big, dirty cities. Father was back here on the farm; the place I remember him best. Tall strong weathered father. How I'd love to be "daddy's little girl" again. It's odd, I thought, my uncle's dead, my cousin's in jail, and I'm walking, by myself, reflecting on the past and a loss of innocence in a world I thought so pure. Should I be mourning? Should I be at the Courthouse? I just want things to be as they were so long ago; no deaths...no jail.

Imagining the townspeople, now awake, did nothing to make me want to go back home. The news will be in every crack of the sidewalks and every corner of every room in every house. I had to go though. Mother would be wondering where I'd gone.

The sun's warmth had long since cut through the early morning's bitter cold, yet, I was nonetheless thankful to be back between the town's houses; they at least partially blocked the chill northern wind.

Mrs. Yoder rushed out as I walked past her home, "Oh, Linda!?" she trilled, "Don't worry about the dresses dear. They can most certainly wait. I'm in no hurry. None at all."

Embarassed, for I had actually forgotten all about the two chiffon dresses I'd promised I'd have to her this afternoon, I stammered, "well, umm...that's very kind of you, Mrs. Yoder."

"Not at all, my dear," and she proceeded to talk about anything and everything, except that which was foremost on her mind.

The neighborhood children were playing hopscotch on the sidewalk across the street, and called a faint greeting as I passed by.

Sun was pouring onto the porch and radiating through the unshaded windows at two-nineteen Waverly; I noted this with neither pleasure nor displeasure. Grabbing the mail from the box on the door, I slowly walked inside. Mother was up and about. She was cleaning in the kitchen. I leaned against the wide doorway and watched her sweep the dirt underneath the heavy, orange, braid rug.

ALAN LICHTER

WEEDS

Why do they have those lovely names,
Celandine, plantain, mountain bluet?
Hawkweed's not bad. So's mallows.

Why do they wear those disguises,
the cornelian cherry and flowered aster
with their shafts of serrate,
the morning glory eager as Nazis,
partridge pea and broom bush tensiled
for smothering even a Cossack's sounds?

The sounds: roots of things,
air in the pistil of the earth.
And when the air turns fevered, sere,
when the sound from the root is
distal and swollen, there comes a name,
unseaming its way to the light,
sealed as a barricade of grass-blades,
an oddment of weeds, scrummy effluvia
of buttercup, dandelion, camomile.

Bill Guess

Logan, West Virginia

In the darkness of the earth's womb
All men are black
Brothers all
The cyclops eye, the bushy-eyebrow father,
the wheeze of seniority
They desecrate the graves of the giants
to feed the assembly line
He has been here always
without time
For time is a day shift job with clean hands
He inherited nothing but myopic aspirations
and a coffee-filled thermos
He returns to the sanctuary of the darkness
For the darkness will provide.

James M. Hughes

Early Snow

like film avant garde Cocteau arms in beauty and beast
the night's arms
bough and bow
to the sheen silvery of the mighty moon
that imitation noon

the weight of the wet but freezing snow is cold storage
heavy
crisply covered sodden and the white essence of heat

still green leaves peep through like worms

such an eternity is outside season with the falling
almost
of too many burdens
the autumnal imminence of winter
at last

what director's responsible for this mis-en-scene ?

cocked and ready
the toe-dancing elves of the laced flurries
modernize their moves

soot waits like constipated shit to fall later than sooner
too

frost and more frost nips the leafy worms in the budding thrust

remembrance, like a cancer, eats cells of obligatory
health

the beauty of the post card scene is two-die -mentionable
like the illusion of the movies

the ruts in roads root for sustenance and grip hungrily
at wheels

it is a beastly night for November

November is a beastly month: its beauty is no-win deep
several inches by morning
a no-emergency

all reality is at last cinematic:
a celluloid void studiously black and white
and all the graves deeply in between

winter/1981

jonathan levant

4 short pieces, or a strange sonnet, or something

(1) more myth

an acorn is an icon of the tree

and daphne's sister also fled

and was turned into trunk.

she had always spoke

like autumnal oak.

(2) thessaly, thessaly (the salty sea)

rain the greatest lover

sea the best beloved

not rigid nor iced over

landlock by flood shoved

(3) glancing glass askance

her bra an albino butterfly

her panties a tea pot shape

chinese silk worm tent.

(4) keep in mind, in heart, that

an intellectual is a person,

an emotional is not.

SW Bliss

November

At noon a restless owl whistles.
No one hears its song.
A cardinal flies into light
while the mockingbird
watches from the shadows.

In the month of dragon tails
I watch as crystals form on the window.
They are the cataracts of which my grandfather warned.
The tell-tale signs of the long past summer.
Each night they grow more cold and translucent.

Winds howl. They care not if I listen.
Red whiskered friends sweep across the drive-way.
They scurry from the owl-breeze.

Birch embers glow warm.
Their orange faces cast dispersions at the wolf
patiently pacing outside my door.

Mary Wohlslagel

Grandpa's Cave

"John, Mark, HELLO-O-O" we called. The only answer was a series of HELLO-O-O, HELLO-O-O, HELLO-O-O's echoing back hollowly, from the cave walls.

"Do you think we should go in after the boys" I asked my husband, John. "It has been nearly two hours since they started to explore the cave."

"We will wait another fifteen minutes and if they aren't out by then, we will go in after them," he answered.

We were standing in the gaping entrance to the deep hole in the side of the rocky mountain. Grandpa Stone had named it the "Blowing Cave" and we could feel the cooling draft brush past our warm bodies as we peered into the blackness.

Just then, a jet plane broke the sound barrier and a terrific sonic boom pierced the air. The ground seemed to shake under us. For just a moment I felt a burning sick feeling in the pit of my stomach as I thought of the tones and tones of rock pressing down on the ceiling of the cave. But then my thoughts went back 50 years to the many times, as a child, I had gone into this same cave. I could remember how much fun the grownups and children had wriggling through the narrow entrance single file, on hands and knees - "spelunking" - we called it. As our hands happened on a slithering lizard or we slipped on the rocks in the trickle of water on the floor, we laughed and squealed. We crawled and scooted along through the long passage. Some places were so narrow, the grownups could just barely squeeze through. Then I remember the awe we felt as we came to the "Grand Hall". All of a sudden we were standing in a gigantic cavern, as large as a cathedral. The ceiling was at least fifty feet high, with thousands of stalactites of iron-marbelized lime hanging down like icicles. Some were as large as tree trunks, others were as slender as a pencil. They were different lengths, with the long ones fusing together with the stalagmites that rose from the cave floor like icicles upside down.

Grandpa explained to us that it took hundreds of years of dripping water to form even a small stalactite. I felt a little guilty about the two small ones I took to show to my classmates.

The sputtering, flickering light from the carbide miner's caps and the shafts of light from the flashlights dancing on the wet ceiling and walls turned the cavern into a glistening fairy palace. In the very center of the hall was a large hole in the floor. We listened intently as the rocks we threw down the hole finally splashed into the water below. Grandpa calculated, by the amount of time the stones took to reach the underground lake, that it must be at least one hundred fifty feet down to the water. We carefully skirted the edge of the hole to reach the other side of the cavern where another narrow passage continued for fifty yards, then stopped abruptly at a solid stone wall.

My thoughts were interrupted by shouts coming from the inside of the cave. With relief, we saw a faint light inside the cave slowly getting brighter and brighter. Finally, the boys emerged, blinking their eyes in the bright sunlight. John said they had reached the back of the cave and had seen names written on the walls.

"Those are the names of your Great Grandfather and his seven sons," I said, "Your grandfather was only ten years old when they chose their names in the cave wall. That was eighty years ago."

Mark showed me the stalactites and stalagmites he had brought out. As I looked at them, I experienced that same strange feeling I had felt forty years ago when I took my souvenirs out of the cave. Once again the privacy of that gigantic dark womb had been violated when the fetus stalagmite had been plucked out before it had time to form into a column to help hold up the ceiling of the ancient cave.

It would be several hundred years and many generations would read the names in the cave before, drip by drip, the lime water would crystallize into stalagmites and stalactites to replace our stolen treasures.

through the asparagus skeletons
against the rustiest violet past
past the southernmost spruce

the leather lining eyes of street lights
wink out one exhausted second one by one
when sensing something potent

it reminds me of humor

through the holiday drippings of the now still
most expressive of pines
the reflected sun stares pane-eyed
sudden unavoidable brilliant
thrice insisting it is on the house
in the house on the ridge across the river

I could wade

to be behind each pupil
stretching out to the hard coming in
arms legs wide
to be abed
a waked-up Hopper woman naked
assaulted alive by the mesmer tongue
of the hot spots across the palette
dead to the fixtures on walls
to cold commandments in corners
the cornices mouldings baseboard

If I bedded there and could have the sun so well
I'd rise to it objectively offensively
that rouge rude rooster who rapes the preview
his dawn

the premature White Swan
who trumpeted soft into my cocoon
coaxed my eyes to wink on
this morning

B. K. Olson

she is only a housewife.
a young mother. bored and
restless. crying softly
into the hot dishwater steam.
dirty clothes churning
rhythmically in the
kenmore washer. afternoon
soap operas keep her
sedentary. a semi-willing
prisoner
within the brick ranch walls.
slowly gaining weight
she cooks creamy gravy
and huge fluffy biscuits
without recipes.
without zeal or pride.
the kitchen with its
shiny tile floors
is undisputed as
her territory.
the rocket-shaped vacuum cleaner
her weapon. passionately
she reads romantic novels.
dreaming of green countrysides
and castle homesteads.
taken to tears on the
crochet-edged pillowcase
nights when her husband
bowls and drinks with the boys.
she keeps an unquestionably
clean house for him because
he is her savage war lord
in white t-shirt and blue jeans.
and she is a country gentlewoman
in flowing flowered muu-muu,
barefoot, with
tow-headed babies gathered
in the folds of her gown.

Sharon Malone



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